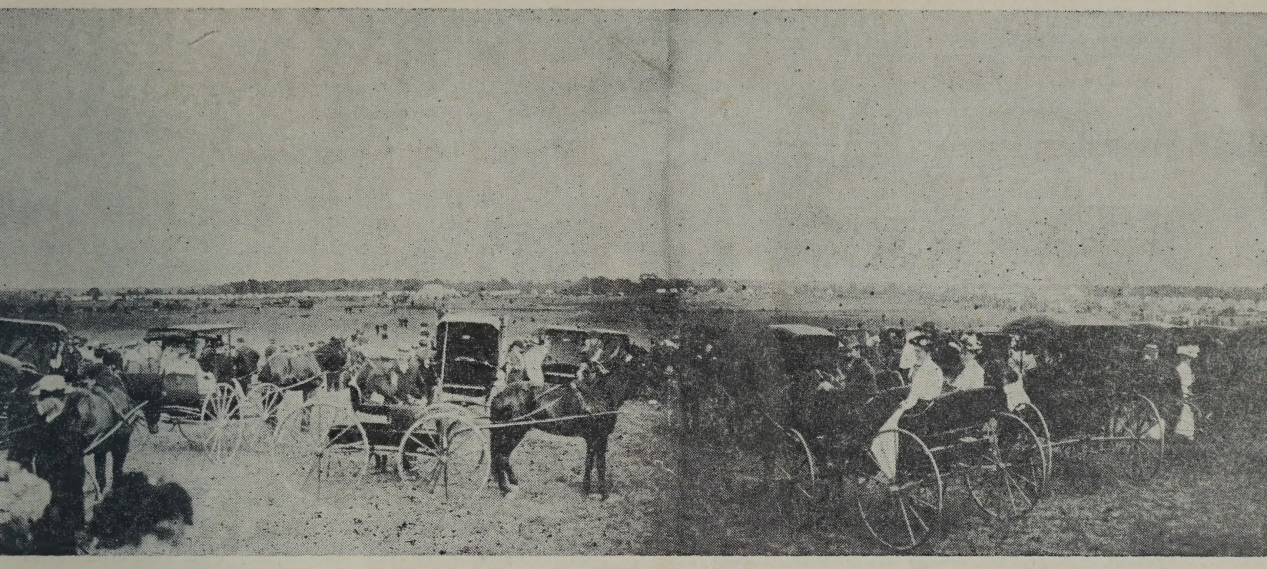

CAMP JOE HOOKER — RECRUITING DAY — MAY 10, 1863
(Photographed from the original in our G.A.R. collections in the museum)

The Middleborough Antiquarian

Published quarterly and devoted to the preservation of local history by

— THE OLD MIDDLEBOROUGH HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION —

VOLUME 1 APRIL 1959 NUMBER 2

In August of 1862, U.S. Army officers canvassed southeastern Massachusetts for a good site for another camp and training ground for Mr. Lincoln's Army. From several possible locations offered, they selected the farms of Harrison Staples and the Jenney family, some 300 acres, on the shore of Lake Assawampsett.

(Middleboro Gazette, Oct. 2, 1958)

With the centennial of the Civil War just around the corner, the illustration seems fitting, proper, and of timely interest. We hope it will be appreciated not only by our own members, but by our contemporary historical societies. The preservation of history is only half accomplished when outstanding records saved and stored in historical collections are not reprinted and published where they may be studied by a greater audience. We hope to continue this program, discovering to our readers little known details of pictorial value that would otherwise be available only to our own relatively small membership.

Our sincere appreciation to the many friends and members of the Bay State League, and other institutions, who took the time and trouble to write saluting our Volume One, Number One. In this day and age of rush and bustle, congratulatory letters are a real expression of honest commendation. Thank you, one and all. We will carry on to the best of our ability.

So far only two small errors in the first issue have come to light. On page four we made an error that might be magnified to first degree murder in the eyes of a serious student of the American Circus. GOATS are bad luck, not horses! Lavinia Warren's (Mrs. Tom Thumb) small tea set was fashioned with rams' heads tapering to goat's legs and feet; the horses appear on the lids of the teapot and sugar bowl! The goats were bad luck, so she gave the set away. The second mistake was only a name — and as Mr. Cushing proves later on in this issue, what's in a name? However, as our secretary pointed out, he is not Richard G. Hinckley, Jr., but Richard O. Hinckley. He added that whereas there were many Hinckleys in New England, he was the only O'Hinckley.

In 1969, Middleboro will celebrate its tercentennial. The Middleborough Antiquarian hopes to offer the committee, appointed to plan the tercentennial year, material from which to draw for a completion of Weston's History of the Town of Middleborough to 1960. With this in mind, we will try to print a collective memory of the past fifty years, as well as bringing to light unrecorded details of earlier times. Few biographies are complete, and fewer histories of the smallest communities contain half the important events. Though today's news is tomorrow's history, people don't value today until it becomes yesterday, and so, many little things are lost before they are recorded. Sometimes even yesterday is hard to recognise and is lost before it becomes history, when it is suddenly appreciated, too often too late to be properly preserved.

Our congratulations to the Mattapoisett Historical Society on their first birthday. Many happy returns of 1959. We are proud that they called upon us for advice in setting up their archives and museum, and we hope the suggestions will make the task easier and more pleasant.

A descendant (and biographer) of Cephas Thompson writes: "I take exception to your statement that Cephas G. Thompson made his home in Middleboro. He was born and grew up in Middleboro but never returned to do any painting after embarking on his career. Therefore he should not be listed as a Middleboro artist." Sometimes it is best to simply make a statement and let others draw their own conclusions. At least we can claim him as a native, and hereby again do so.

The Braintree Historical Society has acquired the General Sylvanus Thayer (1785-1872) home, built in 1720. The society plans to restore the building as of 1785 when the general was born, and preserve it as a memorial to the "Father of the United States Military Academy at West Point." Needless to say, as in the case of most historical institutions in these trying times of masquerading dollars (i.e., dollars no longer nearly dollars), the society would welcome any and all contributions toward the completion of this national monument.

We are indebted to Dr. and Mrs. Herman Delano of South Middleboro for a fine painting, in the original contemporary gilt frame, by Frances King. Mrs. Delano also gave us some early Middleborough and Carver deeds, which will be processed and filed for reference, and preserved. Without such generous, thoughtful citizens, no historical association hopes to survive and play its part in any community. (Even Solomon could not word this hidden request more tactfully). May we hear from **you?**

This second issue speaks for itself. It is **by** the members, **of** the members, and **for** the preservation of American history. It is an indication of the community's spirit and temper, and will, we hope, grow in both quality and quantity.

Many people still feel that "what was good enough for Paw is good enough for us." This is usually quoted as a huge joke; however, like so many old sayings, there is a good smart spark of sense in this small puff of humorous smoke. There always will be human beings who want to see what the Moon is made of, who want to invent something that will blow up the entire universe, who strive to prolong life and who feel sure that two atomic pills for dinner will replace the anticipation and taste of a good roast. Fortunately, there will also always be those who like to live in "Paw's" house with his furnishings and his memories. No village or city or state should be run by ONE man, or even a group of men who all think alike; it isn't healthy — hence the United States of America. A man with no background or roots isn't worth his salt. A man with no memory is a sorry substitute for a human being. A community with no historic consciousness is apt to become just a money-making machine unless both elements are represented. We appeal to the people of Middleboro. Live and let live. Let's get together. Let's try to keep our industries thriving and introduce new ones, but let's also remember our background, and preserve our records of what used to be for coming generations.

THE OLD COLONY RAILROAD HITS INDUSTRIAL ROCK VILLAGE

by

Susan B. Brackett

On May 29th 1847, the first train puffed its way through "Rock Meeting-House" on the way to Sandwich. At that time, if one spoke of going to the Rock, it meant some spot within about three miles of the new railroad station. As the years since have rolled by the village limits have increased considerably.

The industrial enterprises of the village have been many and varied. Although most of us think of Middleboro as THE TOWN, Rock history, with its contributions to industrial development, should not be neglected. With Yankee grit its citizens helped to win independence, and with Yankee ingenuity, its craftsmen created their own little manufacturing center.

We have among our collections a small pine sign with the legend "Stillwater." It once marked the iron foundry, and later the grist and saw mill on Black Brook. We also have a paper read to the Association years ago about the group of men who once managed this beehive of activity. The ore came from Great Quitticas, mined from the lake bottom with ore tongs, similar to quahaug tongs. Landed at the Ore Wharf on the eastern shore in Miller's Woods, it was carted to the foundry and forge.

"The Neck" (now known as Marion Road) also boasted a wheelwright shop, a cider mill and a blacksmith shop. There were also three sawmills. One was on Smith street below Roy Pendleton's home at the dam on the cranberry bog. Another was located between Mr. Walker's and the Bumpus place. The third was at Beaver Dam beyond the house now occupied by Charles Gammons. There was also another blacksmith shop across the street from Mr. Gammons. (In trying to visualise these locations, please remember to cross the state road off your map.)

RECOLLECTIONS OF THE PEIRCE BROTHERS

Charles, William R., James E., and Thomas S.

By

William H. Crapo

These notes are from the memories of a boy who lived in one of the Peirce houses on Jackson street, whose spare time was spent enjoying the fields, meadows and river that bordered sections of the Peirce estate.

In those days there was a large stock barn with twenty or more head of milch cows, two pair of oxen, and a number of young stock. Twenty-five to thirty pigs lived under the barn. The bay horse, however, the constant companion of William R. Peirce who ran the farm, was housed on the hill at the Peirce residence.

William R., or Bill as we knew him, always wore a Prince Albert coat that reached his knees. He rode his Goddard buggy over the vast farm lands but seldom walked. I once saw him take a rather long walk from the upper hay field (now the ball field) to the hydraulic ram located in a spring hole fairly deep in the meadow toward the Star Mill. This for Bill was a long walk. Apparently the ram was not functioning properly at the house where tanks stored water for the store and barn, and required immediate attention. As boys we could never understand how this ram, with its tick, tick, ticking, like a grandfather's clock, could keep pumping day and night apparently with no engine or fuel.

Even after the arrival of city water, this system continued to supply the barn where the herd of Guernseys was washed every morning before going out to pasture. The rich milk was dispensed by Mrs. Gideon Thomas who lived in one of the Peirce houses on Jackson street too. The entire sup ply, with the exception of one four quart can, was sold at five cents a quart. Some of it was delivered to select customers by Harold Thomas in a four-wheeled cart. Harold in later years owned a grocery store on Centre street known by the firm name of Lucas and Thomas.

The cows were of course milked by hand. The milk was strained into a tall metal container. It was pure warm milk — no pasteurizing, or homogenizing — with the original vitamins intact, for five cents a quart. The farm was managed by overseer Bill Peirce, boss farmer William Shaw, assistant head workman David Thompson, and workmen farmers Elisha Shaw and Mike McBarron, the latter a recent immigrant from Ireland.

I remember one haying time when a number of us boys were on hand to tread the hay as it was pitched on the long twenty foot wagon. When it was time to bring up the other team of oxen, Mr. Shaw suggested that I bring them in from the lower pasture near Charlie's Rock some distance away. I jumped at the chance, as this was considered a great honor. Dave Thompson handed be the long rawhide whip, and I marched bravely off toward the white faces. However, when they saw this boy coming, they lowered their heads and lumbered to meet me at a rather quick pace. I jumped aside, and tried again to lead them, but they chased me a ways up the hill. I concluded it was time to give up. Looking back I saw the workmen all laughing, Bill Peirce with the others, all slapping their knees in glee over my inglorious defeat. Giving Elisha Shaw the whip, I watched him drive the docile white faces up the slope to the waiting gear. The oxen would have no part with a small boy directing them.

Charles was often seen in the store but did not have a partnership in the farm or business at that time. James was one of the partners but was very different from Thomas, who in his slow deliberate way, accomplished far more. The store was stocked with bolts of cloth and the usual line of dry goods of the period, besides a limited amount of hardware and fruit. Thomas S. Peirce was the real head of the store, and it was his money that built the Peirce Block and the Public Library. At his death he left over half a million dollars to the town. Although it has been stated that much of the Peirce estate came through the sale of liquor, there was no evidence of it during my life.

Tom Peirce, as we called him in those days, always wore a tall grey beaver hat and a mottled vest. The vest had four pockets filled with coins — large one and two-cent pieces, half cents, two sizes of three-cent pieces and half dimes — from which he would always flip the customer the right change, without looking at it.

All in all, the Peirce brothers operated a pretty successful farm and store.

The following lines written by S. W. Hinds, one of our most loyal members and a constant contributor to our collections through the years, was suggested by Rose E. S. Pratt. It is a priceless picture of what used to be for those who can remember the old railroad station, and Depot Grove. It is reprinted just as he wrote it.

"DEPOT GROVE"

This pleasant resting place, resorted to
By young and old in days gone by, was all
That the old Township that I knew, could call
A Public Park, for we no "Common" knew.
It was a tiny spot of nature rude,
Placed in what was a busy neighborhood
In those days, and it served us as Ball Park,
And Circus Ground and Sunday Meeting Place,
For many years; — and here too, "Carter's Band"
Had for its weekly concerts placed a "stand," —
And many hundreds to these concerts flocked!
Expert croquet fans played here afternoons
In summers past. The fine oaks on the lot
And cromlechs huge, made a romantic spot.

S. W. Hinds

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

by

Robert L. Cushing

OLD MIDDLEBOROUGH is about to celebrate its 290th birthday. A committee is already at work to formulate plans to celebrate properly the Tercentenary Year of 1969.

Among the early problems facing this group was the determination of the actual "birthday" and the legal name of the "baby." The first seems to be definitely settled as June 1, 1669 when the General Court of

New Plimouth created a township at Namassakett, mentioning the general boundaries and ordering that land be provided and reserved for a minister within those bounds.

The name of this township was for a long time to be a real mystery. Incorporation was granted to a township to be known as MIDDLEBERRY. In 1680 records spoke of MIDDLEBERY but court records of 1681 referred to MIDDLEBOROUGH and in 1685 it was MIDDLEBURY. In 1695 a single document speaks of MIDDLEBURRY and MIDDLEBERRY.

The 1695 description of the Plymouth boundary mentions MIDLEBERY while in 1701 it appears as MIDLEBERRY. In 1735 the name commonly appears in most documents as MIDDLEBORO and yet in official documents of Revolutionary War times as MIDDLEBOROUGH.

Private papers of the period make it a further confused situation for one deed of 1675 mentions both MIDDILBURY and MIDDILEBURY.

In summary, June 1, 1669 saw the official beginning of a township which has continued to grow and prosper under the present name of MIDDLEBOROUGH — or is it MIDDLEBORO?

(Editor's note: Carrying these sublimely historic confusions into the realm of the pediculous, I recall a recent envelope that finally reached us without a hitch, due to the experience and sixth sense of our postal system. The address read:

Romaine L. B. Bedford, Esq.
Muddlebord Massachusetts)

THE LE BARON FOUNDRY 1855 - 1959

by

Rose E. S. Pratt

The old blast furnace of earlier years was revived in 1855 when Samuel Tinkham of Taunton and John B. LeBaron built a foundry in Middleborough. The firm of Tinkham and LeBaron carried on a thriving business, and in 1863 Mr. LeBaron purchased Mr. Tinkham's interest.

Mr. LeBaron passed away in March 1884, and was succeeded by his sons, John Baylies LeBaron and Eugene P. LeBaron. Their inventory included all manner of stable furnishings and equipment, stove fittings and parts, ornamental cemetery and garden vases, urns, chairs, settees, and the then popular iron hitching posts. They also made a specialty of patent window weights. (Ed. note: If they had issued an illustrated catalogue of this production line, consider what a valuable pictorial record this would be today of Middleboro's industrial development.)

The brick foundry at No. 22 Vine street covered an area of ten thousand square feet plus an equal space for the pattern shop and storage shed. At pouring time, a fascinating stream of molten iron, like liquid fire and as brilliant as Fourth of July fireworks, flowed from the cupola. Skilled workmen carefully carried the glowing masses in long handled ladles and filled the waiting moulds. The air resounded with the crash of the huge weight as it broke the scrap iron into small bits in the rear of the cupola.

In 1886 Eugene LeBaron assumed control of the foundry, and continued operations until his death in December 1893. At this time his son, E. Leonard LeBaron was appointed administrator of the business, employing forty-two assistants. The output of the LeBaron foundry was distributed to markets all over the Country, as well as supplying its own community with many necessities and luxuries.

A disastrous fire damaged the buildings and equipment on July 15th, 1895. It was rebuilt, and for a few years columns were moulded and shipped to New York for construction purposes. During this period they also made frames for prism glass, used for indirect lighting.

In 1911 the firm moved to Brockton to obtain more space for production, and railroad facilities for shipping. In 1923, Leonard's son, Francis LeBaron, went into the business with his father increased production further. E. Francis LeBaron died in November 1941, leaving Francis in charge until his death in 1949.

Since 1950, Francis Jr., representing the fifth generation of LeBarons, has carried on as head of the firm. During the remodelling of the White House in 1947-1952, the dampers for the new fire places were moulded and supplied by the LeBaron Foundry Co. In addition to their regular line of castings, they are now manufacturing catch basin covers. Though now a Brockton plant, this grand old foundry was and still is a part of Middleborough's history.

(Editor's note: Weston's History devotes one short paragraph to this foundry, telling nothing of its production, and ending its existence, so to speak, in 1884. Mrs. Pratt's story is a complete history. Today's news is tomorrow's history — let's have more of these.)

MIDDLEBOROUGH IN THE WAR OF THE REVOLUTION

by

George Ward Stetson

Though Middleborough knew little of the actual horrors of warfare during the dark days of the Revolution, it was very real to the people of the town. Our borders were in constant threat of invasion from foraging parties of British regulars put ashore from the powerful British fleet which regularly patrolled our shores. Our citizens were reminded daily of the conflict, though miles away, through the many requests for money, clothing and food with which to equip our troops in the field. It is recorded that the townsfolk saw the smoke and heard the cannon from Bunker Hill and that later wounded from that great battle were brought here for care. Many of our homes still cherish relics of Concord, Lexington and of Bunker Hill in the way of flintlocks, powder horns, cartridge cases and belt buckles which were recovered from those fields by our soldiers.

While no battles were fought on Middleborough soil, there are instances of British patrols which entered our town. We recall the story of the English mounted patrol which, while riding past Judge Weston's home in Warrentown headed for Boston, saw the Judge's fresh horse tied to the hitching post. One of the troopers rode into the yard, exchanged his worn-out horse for the Judge's and rejoined his companions on the way to Bridgewater. When the Judge realized what had happened, he angrily mounted the soldier's horse, rode after them, overtaking them at an Inn in Bridgewater where he recaptured his own horse and rode home to Middleborough.

Because of the esteem in which Middleborough's most famous citizen, Judge Peter Oliver, was held, we had many prominent men who remained true to the Crown. However, only two, the Judge and his son, Doctor Peter Oliver, were among the large number who were banished from the country by the Legislature. One of the militia company commanders, Capt. William Canedy, said, "I was commissioned by my King, I was wounded in his service in the "Old French War" and I cannot now be a traitor to him in my old age."

At the outbreak of the war, Middleborough had been divided into four military districts, with a company of militia in each district. As these men were officered by men commissioned by the king, they resigned their commissions, with several of them receiving new commissions by act of the Legislature. By 1777 eight companies had been raised and formed into a regiment commanded by Colonel Ebenezer Sproat, who with his father had operated the famous Sproat Tavern on Middleborough Green. Serving largely in Rhode Island, they were called the Rhode Island Alarm troops.

Three of these eight companies of militia were classified as "Minute Men" companies. Middleborough also had over one hundred and seven men enter the service as Continental soldiers, enlisting for the three-year or duration period. At one time over sixty-five men were absent from the First Church at The Green on active military service.

Captain Joshua Eddy raised a company of Continental or regular troops, largely from the East Middleborough section, which was present when Burgoyne surrendered at Saratoga. He was serving as an aide to General Washington when he heard that great General upbraid General Lee at Monmouth, saying, "Had you taken that position with your

command as I ordered, we would have captured the whole British Army."

Colonel Ebenezer Sproat had also served as a Staff Officer under General Washington. He was at one time commended by General Baron Von Steuben. His portrait, a miniature, was painted by General Kosciusko, the great Polish General and patriot during the war. We are told that it is his only known likeness, and that this painting is now to be seen in the Historical Museum at Marietta, Ohio. While serving in Ohio, the then frontier, his huge stature, commanding figure and piercing eyes caused the Indians to call him "Old Buckeye." His fame as one of the original founders of the state of Ohio is the reason that today Ohio is known as the Buckeye State.

Few towns of our size can boast of the great personages of the Revolutionary period who have been entertained within our borders. This is due entirely to the fact that Judge Oliver, who served as the Chief Justice of the highest court in the land and who ranked second only to the King's Governor, made his home on the shores of the Nemasket River in Middleborough.

Many years have come and gone since the stirring days of the War for Independence. It must be our part to keep alive the part which Middleborough men and women took in securing our freedom and in establishing the nation which we love.

CAMP JOE HOOKER 1862 - 1918

by

Mertie E. Whitbeck

The illustration heading the current issue of the MIDDLEBOROUGH ANTIQUARIAN pictures Camp Joe Hooker, once a part of Middleborough, being used as a training ground for the grim business of war. But many an old-timer in Middleborough and Lakeville can remember when the Camp was covered with tents and soldiers and pervaded with much more of a carnival atmosphere than that of war.

There have been several occasions since the Camp was first used as a training ground for the Civil War when it has been used for training the regular and reserve armies, at which times mock battles took place all over the seventy square miles of the town, extending into Bridgewater, Plympton, Halifax and Wareham.

The first such encampment the writer can recall took place at just about the turn of the century. The town was filled with "Red" and "Blue" soldiers, and every day horse-drawn vehicles of all descriptions converged on the spot where the mock battle was to take place that day. The conveyances would draw up in a line along the stone wall by the side of a country road, perhaps in Halifax or Plympton. Rifle fire would ring out in the distance; then across a nearby field, bent low and carrying rifles, would scuttle a dozen soldiers. Leaping over the stonewall, they would disappear in the woodland on the other side of the road.

Again about 1915 Camp Joe Hooker was filled with white tents and khaki-clad soldiers. Great crowds from Middleborough and surrounding towns gathered daily to watch the soldiers on parade, or filing into their mess tents and especially did the crowd gather at sunset time when taps were sounded and the flag lowered for the night. It was indeed a thrilling sight, too, to see strings of dozens of horses being galloped down the narrow road leading to Lake Assawampsett, where they were watered.

In scrap books of the period made of newspaper clippings from the writings of the late James H. Creedon, there are several articles telling of the difficulty of the store-keepers in attempting to supply the demand for food. During these encampments soldiers swarmed into town, invading the stores and restaurants, completely depleting the supply of food. One item mentions that the soldiers found the army hardtack more suitable for sending home as a souvenir than for use as food.

General Joseph Hooker, for whom the camp was named, so distinguished himself on the field of battle that he won the title, "Fighting Joe." His leadership at the Battle of Chancellorsville was superb. However, after being placed in command of the Army of the Potomac, he failed to show the qual-

ities needed to lead his army to victory. After much pressure from the North, and differences of opinion with General Halleck, he lost the confidence of President Lincoln and offered his resignation which was accepted. Many Middleborough men served under General Hooker in the Civil War. To his honor and memory, there stands in front of the State House in Boston, a fine statue of General Hooker astride his spirited horse.

One of the fondest memories of those long acquainted with Camp Joe Hooker is that of the two stately elm trees which stood from time immemorial on a rise of ground overlooking the camp and known to generations as "Aunt Betsy" and "Uncle Joe." Now the trees, like the camp itself, have bowed to time and progress.

(Editor's note: American Heritage has contributed great popular tales of our Civil War, and current authors are re-creating the history of America's crisis, but none of them include Camp Joe Hooker — it's ours, and we are proud of it.)

WILLIAM R. PEIRCE AND THE BOYS' BRIGADE

by

Theodore N. Wood

The display at a recent meeting of a portrait of the late William R. Peirce, executed by a classmate of the writer, whose talents in this direction had been hitherto unsuspected, brought to mind a boyhood encounter. In attempting to describe that meeting for these pages, it seems better to abandon the more modest third person, and tell it as a personal recollection.

In the first place, it probably would never have happened at all had it not been for the fact that Mr. Peirce, who was a rather close friend of my grandfather, was in the habit of calling on him every Thursday evening, at precisely seven o'clock, remaining until the clock struck eight, and then taking his departure. Whether this particular time was chosen because my grandmother was likely to be absent at prayer meeting I never knew. At any rate, circumstances presumably furnished me with an opportunity for rather closer acquaintance with the dignified Mr. Peirce than most of my contemporaries. To this fact was doubtless due my selection from among the members of the "Boys' Brigade," a church organization to which I belonged, to put the bite on Mr. Peirce for a contribution to the fund being raised for the purchase of certain military equipment.

Not without some misgivings, I called on him at the old store and stated my errand. He looked me over with some deliberation, and then asked me, "What do you think of the Borden murders?" This question was not quite as irrelevant as might be thought since he knew that my grandfather was well acquainted with Mr. Borden, one of the victims. What I responded I do not now recall, but I doubt if it contributed much to either the criminal or the legal aspect of the case. However, he immediately took out his wallet, undid its straps, drew out a five dollar bill, and handed it to me!

I suppose I expressed the thanks of the organization for his generosity, but far more likely, overcome with elation at the thought of having presumably hit the jackpot in comparison with my fellow solicitors, I headed for the door without further ceremony.

Although the editor seems to have confined me to one small story in his heading, this may be a good opportunity to contribute just one more William Peirce recollection. While being sworn as a witness in some presumably trivial case, he was asked his occupation. Without change of expression he replied solemnly, "Agent for the Northern Lights."

Unfortunately in this period of inflation, maxims and old sayings do not always hold water. Whereas one hundred and fifty active, enthusiastic and loyal members are worth a thousand socially minded contributors in any organization, dues are facts. We need members and make no bones about it.

If you like the Antiquarian and feel that you would like to contribute not only to our bank account, but to our efforts to preserve Middleboro history, we'd like to hear from you.